Chapter 30: Why Have the Children of Chernivtsi Lost All of Their Hair?

By Dr. Daniel Hryhorczuk, MD, MPH (pictured above left) Ukraine, 1988

Presentation by Tara Bruckler

In 1988, first-generation Ukrainian American and Professor of Epidemiology at the University of Chicago, Dr. Daniel Hryhorczuk was sent to Chernivtsi in the Soviet Ukraine to aide in the investigation of the mysterious illness which causes total alopecia, upper respiratory systems, and night terrors. Both the Soviet and Ukrainian Ministries of Health had concluded the cause to be a chemical toxin of unknown origin. Dr. Hryhorczuk, whom had suspected Thallium poisoning initially, began his 3 week long investigation finding the lack of communication from other investigators, the Soviet refusal to share “top secret” documents concerning the military installations and the general distrust of the government by the residents a difficult venture. Returning in 1989 to a newly independent Ukraine, he discovered that not only was he correct about the Thallium poisoning, but that the public had every right to distrust the Soviet politicians. They never come clean about the details of the poisoning but they didn’t deny the rumor of the wastes of toxins from the military (off limits) industrial complex being the source of the contaminations either.
• Why did the mysterious illness in Chernivtsi hit so close to home for Dr. Hryhorczuk?
• Why did Dr. Hryhorczuk suspect Thallium poisoning even before visiting Chernivtsi?
• What were the incidents that lead to so much distrust of Chernivtsi residents for the governments’ abilities concerning the illness?
• Why did the Ukrainian president’s representative take the initiative to send delegation to Canada to seek assistance?
• What was Dr. Prodanchuk arrested for while meeting with WHO?
• What realization did Dr. Hryhorczuk come to concerning his assistant, Vasyl?
• What was the case definition?
• What lead Dr. Hryhorczuk to the possibility of authorities deliberately trying to thwart the investigation?
• What was so different about Dr. Hryhorczuk’s 1989 visit to Chernivtsi and the discovery of the truth?
• What are the five lessons shared by Dr. Hryhorczuk?